

A Strong Indictment Against the Amendment.

Jacksonville, Fla., Oct. 22, 1906.

I presume that no question or more importance has been submitted to the electors of Florida to pass upon, in many years, than the proposed drainage amendment to the constitution. It is of so much importance that it should not be considered from the standpoint of factional politics, or how it may effect the political status of any official individual, but only that of interest to the people of the state, without other interest than love of my native state and her people who have bestowed upon me high honors, I have thought it proper to give some brief expression of my views on the subject.

I am opposed to the amendment for the following reasons:

1. I do not think that the Everglades can be drained so as to become available for cultivation without the expenditure of a large sum of money, that it is practicable for the state to raise without the serious oppression of a large number of her citizens.

2. It is not the part of wisdom to spend money on drainage while the very lands sought to be drained are in litigation, claimed by various companies under legislative land grants. Many lawyers are of the opinion that by vesting the legal title of the swamp lands in the International Improvement Board, the legislature did not invest itself of the power of further controlling the disposition of the lands. Whether or not this opinion is sound, it is better to suspend operations until the courts have finally decided.

3. The proposed amendments should combine in five individuals the legislative powers of levying taxes, the executive powers of carrying on drainage operations and expending the monies raised by taxation, and the quasi judicial powers of determining what lands they will class as alluvial or swamp and overflowed. This is contrary to the principles of republican form of government, which is careful to keep those three departments separate and distinct.

4. The powers vested in the drainage commissioners are without those limitations which are necessary for safety. The uncontrolled handling of vast sums of money which would go into their hands might develop a political machine of proportions greatly to the injury of our people, without questioning the integrity of the present board, we cannot know who will be their successors or fill their places in after years.

5. The taxation feature would abrogate to that extent that clause of the constitution, as it now exists, requiring "a uniform and equal rate of taxation." By the proposed amendment the board of drainage commissioners are authorized and empowered to establish drainage districts and fix the boundaries thereof.

* * * to prepare a list or lists of all the alluvial or swamp and overflowed lands within such drainage districts and levy thereon a acreage tax not exceeding ten cents per acre, to be fixed annually." It is made the duty of the respective collectors to collect such tax. There is no limit to the continuation of such annual assessments, nor is there any restriction to the extent of the drainage district. The lands to be taxed may be ten, fifty or a hundred miles from the lands drained, they may not be benefited in the slightest by the drainage operations, or the owner might not want his lands drained, yet if they lie within the drainage district and are listed for taxation by the commissioners, he must pay the tax as long as it is assessed or suffer his lands to be confiscated. If ones lands were listed for drainage taxation that were not in fact alluvial, swamp or overflowed (which I am informed has been done in some cases), it is very doubtful whether the owner would have any relief as against such action of the commissioners. The taxation is not according to value. A, who may own 500 acres of land worth \$500.00 has to pay the same tax that B pays on 500 acres of land worth \$2500.00, if both tracts are listed for taxation in the same drainage district. C may own lands adjoining A or B, but lying outside of the drainage district, yet A and B are taxed and C pays no taxes. Let not those who live outside of the present drainage district take the position that it is no concern of theirs. It is their concern that they do not contribute to impose upon their fellow citizens living in any portion of the state a constitutional amendment which will impose upon them such unequal and oppressive taxation. Nor, from a selfish view, can they know when a drainage district will be laid off

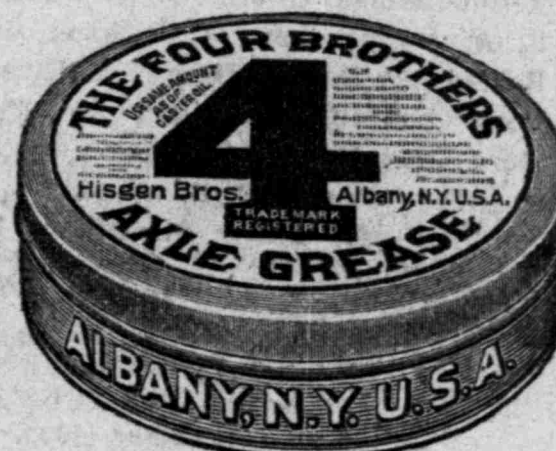
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